

In September 2014, the Greens left the six-party government coalition over a disagreement on nuclear power policy. The government had granted a license to a Russian consortium aiming to build a new megaplant even though the application was plagued by irregularities.

A continued slump in the economy and significant layoffs in the two main sectors of technology and paper/forestry fueled public dissatisfaction with political leadership, allowing the nationalist Finns Party to continue its political ascent.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 40 / 40 [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The president, whose role is mainly ceremonial, is directly elected for a six-year term. The president appoints the prime minister and deputy prime minister from the majority party or coalition after elections; the selection must be approved by parliament. Representatives in the 200-seat unicameral Eduskunta are elected to four-year terms. Finland joined the European Union (EU) in 1995 and is the only Nordic country to have adopted the euro as its currency.

The 2011 parliamentary elections resulted in a dramatic shift in Finnish politics. The KOK and SDP took 44 seats and 42 seats, respectively, while the ruling Center Party captured 35 seats and was ousted from power. The populist, nationalist party the True Finns gained an unprecedented 19 percent of the popular vote, increasing its seats from 5 to 39 and becoming the third-largest party in the legislature. The governing coalition at the end of 2014 comprised the moderate conservative National Coalition Party (KOK), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Left Alliance, the Swedish People's Party, and the Christian Democrats.

Pro-EU and pro-euro former finance minister Sauli Niinistö of the KOK handily won the presidency in 2012, defeating the Green League candidate, Pekka Haavisto, with 63 percent of the vote. Elections are free and fair.

Prime Minister Jyrka Kaitiainen of the KOK left the government in June 2014 for a new post as EU commissioner. Minister of Foreign Trade Alexander Stubb replaced him as prime minister.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Finland boasts a robustly free political environment with a strong opposition.

The political identity of the Finns Party on the subject of immigration remains a controversial subject, both within and outside the party. While leader Timo Soini has sought to maintain a more moderate stance on immigration, several high-profile party members who serve in parliament also belong to the nationalist group Suomen Sisu. This faction has expressed fierce disagreement with the party leadership on immigration. Controversial parliamentarian James Hirvisaari was expelled from the True Finns in 2013 for

posting pictures online of a friend performing a Nazi salute in parliament; his expulsion was interpreted by some as an effort to shift the party's image toward the political mainstream. The Finns' main political focus in 2014 continued to be euroskepticism.

There is comprehensive political protection of minorities. The Åland Islands—an autonomous region located off the southwestern coast whose inhabitants speak Swedish—have their own 30-seat Parliament, as well as a seat in the national legislature. The indigenous Sami of northern Finland have their own legislature, the Sameting, but are not represented in the Eduskunta.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Corruption is not a significant problem in Finland, which was ranked 3 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index. A 2009 law was amended the following year to require candidates and parties to report campaign donations of more than €800 (\$1,030) in local elections or €1,500 (\$1,930) in parliamentary elections.

In September 2014, the Green League left the government over disagreements on domestic nuclear energy policy as well as concerns over a conflict of interest for Minister of Economic Affairs Vapaavuori. The minister had signed a nuclear plant-supply contract with Russian company Rosatom in 2013 and approved permits for a new plant in northern Finland to be partly owned by the company. The process was plagued by irregularities. There were also concerns over the extent of Russian ownership, given the developing political situation in Ukraine.

Civil Liberties: 60 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

Finnish law provides for freedom of speech, which is respected in practice. Finland has a large variety of newspapers and magazines and protects the right to reply to public criticism. Newspapers are privately owned but publicly subsidized. Many are controlled by or support a particular political party. Since 2012, a value added tax on subscriptions to newspapers and magazines has contributed to financial difficulties for the sector.

In June 2014, the case of a photographer convicted in 2007 for disobeying the police while covering a 2006 demonstration in Helsinki was referred to the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). A February ECHR ruling was in favor of the Finnish Supreme Court, which had upheld that the journalist was guilty of disobeying police orders. However, because two dissenting opinions in the February ruling cited concerns over a "chilling effect on press freedom," the Grand Chamber heard the case in December; it had not published its judgment by year's end.

Finns enjoy freedom of religion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church are both state churches and receive public money from the income taxes of members; citizens may exempt themselves from contributing to those funds, but must renounce their membership. Religious communities other than the state churches may also receive state funds. Religious education is part of the curriculum in all secondary public schools, but students may opt out in favor of more general instruction in ethics.

Academic freedom is respected. In October 2014, the national parliament scheduled a public hearing for

spring 2015 on abolishing Swedish as Finland's second official language; this would mean an end to compulsory Swedish in comprehensive schools.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of association and assembly are upheld in law and in practice. Workers have the right to organize and bargain collectively, though public-sector workers who provide services deemed essential may not strike. In October 2014, the Trade Union for the Public and Welfare Sectors called for a 24-hour work stoppage in Helsinki involving 9,000 metro and tram workers in protest against the planned privatization of county provider Palmia; the privatization ultimately went through. Approximately 70 percent of workers belong to trade unions.

F. Rule of Law: 16 / 16

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary. The president appoints Supreme Court judges, who in turn appoint lower-court judges. Finland has been criticized by the European Court of Human Rights for slow trial procedures. The Ministry of the Interior controls police and Frontier Guard forces.

Ethnic minorities and asylum seekers report occasional police discrimination. The criminal code covers ethnic agitation and penalizes anyone who threatens a racial, national, ethnic, or religious group. A 2012 ruling by the country's Supreme Administrative Court led to a new interpretation of Finland's immigration law that could allow several hundred rejected asylum seekers to stay in Finland and receive residency permits if their countries of origin refuse to receive forcible deportations. The number of asylum seekers in this position increased tenfold in 2014. In September, Interior Minister Räsänen announced plans to offer rejected asylum seekers a lump sum to return to their homelands; however by year's end no specific details of the amendment were available. A little over half of all the asylum applications ruled on in 2014 were rejected. Immigration issues remained divisive in 2014, in part fueled by the rapid political ascent of the Finns Party.

The constitution guarantees the Sami people (who constitute less than 1 percent of the population) cultural autonomy and the right to pursue their traditional livelihoods, which include fishing and reindeer herding. Their language and culture are also protected through public financial support. However, representatives of the community have complained that they cannot exercise their rights in practice and that they do not have the right to self-determination with respect to land use. While Roma also make up a very small percentage of the Finnish population, they are more significantly disadvantaged and marginalized.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 16 / 16

Finland has one of the most expansive legal definitions of "freedom to roam" in the world. Provided the privacy of a private residence is not violated and no environmental damage is incurred, anybody is free to use any land, public and private, for outdoor recreation purposes, without having to seek permission beforehand. Intellectual and physical property rights are upheld in Finland. There are no major obstacles to establish a business, and the country boasts a well-regulated, transparent, and open economy.

Women enjoy equal rights in Finland. Women hold approximately 43 percent of the seats in parliament.

Despite a law stipulating equal pay for equal work, women earn only about 85 percent as much as men with the same qualifications. Domestic violence is an ongoing concern. An amendment to the constitution in 2012 allowed for citizens' initiatives, which require parliament to consider petitions with more than 50,000 signatures.

Parliament passed a bill legalizing same-sex marriage in November 2014, after it was submitted by citizens' initiative. However, the bill remains controversial in Finland and will not be in effect until 2016, giving opponents a chance to overturn it after the parliamentary elections slated for April 2015.

Finland remains a destination and a transit country for trafficked men, women, and children. Amendments to the Alien Act in 2006 allow trafficked victims to stay in the country and qualify for employment rights.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)